

United sound out massive warning

AFP, Manchester



Wayne Rooney signed off before his controversial three-match suspension by orchestrating Manchester United's emphatic 5-1 victory over a hapless Fulham to ensure Sir Alex Ferguson's side got their Premiership campaign off to a winning start here on Sunday.

The England striker, who will now be sidelined following his dismissal against FC Porto in the recent Amsterdam tournament, was irresistible scoring twice and playing a major role as Louis Saha, Cristiano Ronaldo and an own goal from Fulham's Ian Pearce completed United's goal haul.

With Heidar Helguson's deflected shot off Rio Ferdinand providing the only blemish on an almost perfect afternoon for United, any doubts about how they cope with the loss of Ruud van Nistelrooy were quickly blown away.

United's pre-season campaign had been marred by the sendings off of Rooney and Paul Scholes in

Amsterdam, the injury to 18 million pounds midfielder Michael Carrick, and repeated failures in the transfer market.

But any early gloom was quickly forgotten as United shredded a desperately unimpressive Fulham defence with a devastating four-goal blitz inside the opening 20 minutes to serve notice on champions Chelsea that this year's title race will be a more closely fought contest.

And with Rooney and Ronaldo showing their spat when England met Portugal in the World Cup quarterfinal is now well and truly behind them, an air of optimism descended on Old Trafford long before half-time.

Ferguson stills hopes to add more new faces to his squad with Bayern Munich's Owen Hargreaves the principal target, but this win added support to the United manager's claim that his squad is already sufficiently strong to mount a realistic challenge in the league.

With just seven minutes gone, Ryan Giggs drilled a left wing cross into the Fulham box where Saha was allowed to head home unchallenged from just six yards.

Then seven minutes later it was Saha's turn to act as provider, sending in a low cross towards the near post where Pearce turned the ball past his own keeper under pressure from Rooney.

Within two more minutes, the game had turned into a rout as Rooney pounced on a loose ball to make it three and in the 19th minute it was the striker's cross that allowed Ronaldo to volley home at the far post.

Helguson's fortunate deflected effort gave Fulham pride in the 40th minute, but normal service was restored when Rooney slotted home just after the hour to make it five.

Fulham's dreadful away form last season almost pushed them into the relegation zone and with manager Chris Coleman insisting out-of-favour playmaker Steed Malbranque will never play for the club again, another long hard campaign awaits.

Ronaldo can handle terrace taunts

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United boss Sir Alex Ferguson believes Cristiano Ronaldo will be strong enough to handle the terrace taunts this season.

The winger has already been verbally abused at a friendly in Oxford after being singled out following England's World Cup exit to Portugal and more of the same can be expected at Charlton and Watford this week as Manchester United embark on their first away days of the new Premiership season.

So far, the 21-year-old has shown little sign of being affected by the barracking, scoring twice at Oxford, then another in United's friendly win over Sevilla when he received huge applause from the home fans.

"We don't need to shield Cristiano," said Ferguson.

"I don't think fans are that vicious in terms of needing security and safety."

"They may boo. That is no problem. Cristiano is mentally strong, so they can boo as long as they like."

"These situations are nothing new to us. We had it with Eric Cantona and David Beckham. They

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PHOTO: INTERNET

Diego Maradona kisses his daughter Gianina prior to the start of the match between Boca Juniors and Independiente in Buenos Aires on Saturday. Maradona is a devout supporter of his old club from where he started his luminous career.

Bayern hunt 'King Knall'

INTERNET, undated

Despite this summer's transfer window yet to close, German double winners Bayern Munich are already preparing a move for Werder Bremen striker Miroslav Klose in 2007. "If Miro is on the market next year, then we'll certainly do what we can to try to sign him," said general manager Uli Hoeneß.

The 28-year-old has blossomed since moving to Bremen from Kaiserslautern two years ago, and struck 25 goals in 26 games last season, followed by five more for the German national side in the World Cup. Just this week he was named in an annual survey by Kicker magazine as Germany's footballer of the year.

"King Knall", as he is fondly referred to in German tabloids, has stated his desire to move abroad on a number of occasions, though he admitted his delight at hearing of interest from the Bavarian giants: "It's nice to hear. Bayern is a top club. We'll see what happens," he stated.

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Messi picked for Brazil clash

Football

REUTERS, London

Londoners will witness the first appearance in international soccer of gifted teenage striker Sergio Agüero when Argentina meet Brazil in a friendly at Arsenal's Emirates stadium next month.

Agüero has been picked along with teenager Lionel Messi of Barcelona in new coach Alfio Basile's squad for the Sept. 3 match against Argentina's arch-rivals.

The 18-year-old has impressed for Atletico in pre-season games since joining the Spanish club from Independiente for a reported 25-30 million-dollar at the end of May.

Messi, almost exactly a year older having turned 19 during the World Cup finals in which his limited

appearances prevented him from making the expected impact, is one of 10 players from Jose Pekerman's squad in the Germany tournament.

Others who helped Argentina reached the quarterfinals before going out to the hosts on penalties, include the impressive Brazil-based Corinthians pair Carlos Tevez and Javier Mascherano and Villarreal playmaker Juan Roman Riquelme.

Atletico's Maxi Rodriguez, who scored one of the great goals of the World Cup, a volley in the 2-1 extra-time victory over Mexico in the second round, is also in Basile's 20-man squad.

Centre-backs Roberto Ayala, embroiled in a pay dispute with Valencia, and Manchester United's Gabriel Heinze, who is unfit, were not included but Basile recalled Inter Milan's Walter Samuel, a 2002

World Cup veteran overlooked by Pekerman.

Also left out were strikers Hernan Crespo, who has just returned to Italy for Inter Milan on loan from Chelsea, and Javier Saviola, whose Barcelona future is in doubt.

The only home-based player is 32-year-old Boca Juniors full-back Hugo Ibarra, formerly of Monaco, Porto and Espanyol.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Roberto Abbondanzieri (Getafe), Leo Franco (Atletico Madrid)

Defenders: Hugo Ibarra (Boca Juniors), Fabricio Coloccini (Deportivo Coruna), Gabriel Milito (Real Zaragoza), Walter Samuel (Inter Milan), Clemente Rodriguez (Spartak Moscow), Fabricio Fuentes (Atlas)

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Chess players leave for KL

SPORTS REPORTER

Five chess players left Dhaka yesterday to take part in the IGM third Dato Arthur Tan Malaysian Open Championship to be held in Kuala Lumpur over August 21-27.

The players are Grand Masters Niaz Mursheed and Ziaur Rahman, FM Mehdi Hasan Parag, IWM Rani Hamid and Masuda Begum.

On the other hand, International Master Enamul Hossain Rajib will leave Dhaka on Wednesday for Yemen to take part in the Fifth President Ali Abdullah Saleh International Open Championship to be held in Aden over August 23-29.

Magura alive

Football

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Magura brightened their chances to book a place in the last four of the Jubok Phone National Football Championship when they registered a 2-1 victory over Bangladesh Navy at the Sylhet Stadium yesterday.

But they have to wait for the last Group A match between Dhaka and Bangladesh Navy on Tuesday at the same venue to know their fate.

With the day's outcome, Magura improved their tally to four points after the 1-1 draw against formidable Dhaka in the opening game and they will progress to the semifinals if

the last group match ends in draw. On the other hand, goal average will decide the fate if Dhaka win their last battle.

Magura started the game with great pace with Lajuk, Jhuku and Shah Alam controlling the midfield brilliantly with short passings.

And it was Lajuk who put his side ahead in the 12th minute when his nice shot from just outside the danger box rocketed into the net leaving the opponent goalkeeper Kamal Uddin helpless.

Noor Hossain Ripon doubled the margin in the 24th minute as he dodged past a defender and the goalkeeper to finish the job comfortably.

In the first-half, Navy's Saiful cleared a Lajuk shot from the goalline.

The Navy comparatively played better in the second-half and surrendered some easy chances before Masum Mulla's powerful shot equalised reduce the margin in the 72nd minute.

Magura's Lajuk was adjudged man-of-the-match.

TEAMS

MAGURA: Rezwan, Riad, Lajuk, Mintu, Younis, Jhuku, Shah Alam, Khokan, Ripon, Noor Islam and Mamun.

NAVY: Kamal, Jashim, Shaokat, Saiful, Abul, Nesar, Mamun, Moniruzzaman, Shikhon, Jahangir and Saleh Ahmed.

Juve start bright

Football

REUTERS, Rome

Underfire Juventus began the season with a 3-0 win over third division Martina Franca in the first round of the Italian Cup on Saturday.

Goals by Pavel Nedved and new signings Marco Marchionni and Valeri Bojinov gave the Turin giants a victory in their first competitive outing since they were relegated to the second division following a match-fixing trial.

In a twist of fate, the scene of their latest triumph was Bari's San Nicola stadium, the ground where they beat Reggina 2-0 in the final match of last season to win their 29th Serie A title, a trophy they had to concede to Inter Milan after the trial.

Juve begin the defence of the league title at Uniao Leiria on Friday. Still smarting from their failure earlier this week to persuade Italy's football federation



PHOTO: STAR

FRIENDS AGAIN: Manchester United winger Cristiano Ronaldo (L) celebrates his strike against Fulham with clubmate Wayne Rooney (C) during their Premiership match at Old Trafford on Sunday.

Rooney ravages ban

Football

AFP, Manchester

England striker Wayne Rooney has threatened to stop co-operating with the Football Association's (FA) commercial deals in protest at his three-game ban, according to reports here Sunday.

The 20-year-old was banned for his red card in a pre-season friendly against Porto earlier this month.

Rooney's agent Paul Stretford has sent a letter to FA chief executive Brian Barwick saying his client "feels extremely let down".

He stressed Rooney's "dismay" would not however affect his availability as a player for England, but that the Manchester United forward was ready to pull out of commercial activities for the FA.

Stretford's letter reportedly said: "I am writing on behalf of my client to express his utter dismay at the decision not to overturn the ban. Rooney feels extremely let down by the FA on this matter.

Porto lift Portuguese Super Cup

REUTERS, Leiria, Portugal

Portuguese double winners Porto beat Cup runners-up Vitoria Setubal 3-0 on Saturday to win the Super Cup, the new season's curtain-raiser.

Porto opened the scoring after 54 minutes through a bicycle kick from Brazilian striker Adriano.

With Porto's new coach Jesualdo Ferreira in the stands and caretaker Rui Barros on the bench, the champions doubled the lead after 75 minutes when Brazilian teenager Anderson tapped in.

One minute from the final whistle substitute Vieirinha completed the route with a powerful shot from outside the area.

Ferreira, Porto's sixth coach since they won the Champions League in 2004 under Jose Mourinho, replaced Dutchman Co Adriaanse who resigned last week after steering the club to the double.

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